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VADIM MEDVEDEV UNDER ATTACK

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VADIM MEDVEDEV UNDER ATTACK

The July 18, 1989 Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU) meeting entitled "Rethinking the Party's Function and Role in Society" addressed several issues. One of the most important topics discussed was the decline of ideology in the media. It becomes apparent upon reading the text of the speeches that several members of the top leadership, including key members of the Politburo, resent the fact that reform-oriented Party ideologist Vadim Medvedev allowed *glasnost* to go so far as to criticize the CPSU through various media and neglected proper ideological training in bodies under his supervision.

Vadim Medvedev's appointment as Party secretary in charge of ideology occurred at the Central Committee Plenum on September 30, 1988. As a secretary, he supervises the newly formed Ideology Commission which also oversees the commissions by the same name on the republic level. The work of this commission and the republic-level Ideology Commissions lacks substance and direction. The Central Committee Ideology Department (which absorbed the Propaganda, Science and Education, and Culture Departments) is subordinate to the Ideology Commission. Its work, since the September reorganization, indicates confusion since it now acts as a "super department." Since his appointment, it is apparent that Medvedev is an ardent supporter of unlimited *glasnost* in the media which leads to attacks on previously taboo subjects such as Lenin's role in the formation of the Soviet state and the October 1917 Revolution. This de-ideologization, as argued by some in the leadership, is the source for much of the upheaval facing Soviet society today.

Medvedev faced problems after his appointment: the ideology chief was cut out of the November 7, 1988 leadership lineup in *Pravda*. Also, Medvedev is on the defensive on issues surrounding *glasnost* in the media. For example, the popular television program "Vzgliad" has been the source of much debate since it began to discuss topics sensitive to the leadership. Conservatives in the leadership reacted harshly to Medvedev's lack of ability to control the situation and attacked him for allowing ideological principles to be challenged by the media.¹ In addition, his view on the creation of a market in the Soviet Union counters most of the views articulated by his associates on the Politburo. Finally, Medvedev stated that a multiparty system might be acceptable. In a speech given in Minsk he argues, "As

¹*Pravda*, April 27, 1989.

concerns my position regarding the discussion of questions of single-party or multiparty systems, I must say that the existence of several parties is not illegal for socialism or socialist countries."²

Medvedev's colleagues on the Politburo are not amused by his inability to control his sector of responsibility. In his speech to the conference, Politburo Member and Party Secretary Lev Zaikov indirectly criticizes the Ideology Department's inability to function under perestroika: "The party gorkom supported a raikoms' initiative on the production of raion newspapers, which are of exceptionally great importance for Moscow, but without the support at the CPSU Central Committee Ideological Department..."³

Although Zaikov does see benefits in glasnost in the media, he hints that limits need to be imposed: "The press has indeed done a lot for perestroika. But what is happening now? These are indiscriminate propaganda of Western values. The news from over there is about luxury villas, cars, store windows, and so on. And what about the news from our own country? Perpetual shortages, lawbreaking, drug addiction. As if perestroika had changed nothing, as if we find no other color but black to paint pictures of ourselves."⁴

Politburo Member Egor Ligachev, stripped of his ideological function at the September 1988 Central Committee Plenum, discusses the role of ideology in mass media and indicates that glasnost needs limits: "The mass news media play a great role in the party's organizational and ideological activity. That is common knowledge, so there is no point in developing the thought. They are working solidly in the field of perestroika. Admittedly in different ways. There are some things here that it is really impossible to agree with. Diktat by certain groups reigns in certain news organs and there is in fact no pluralism or democracy there."⁵

In one of the strongest attacks upon Medvedev, Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov bluntly states "It is especially necessary...to single out major miscalculations in ideology. Inertia on the part of the corresponding departments and party Central Committee secretaries (on the republic level) in this very important sphere of party activity results—and this must be said outright—in the increasing de-ideologization of society."⁶ Although the commissions on the republic level are meeting, they do not produce anything of substance. Thus, Medvedev's supervision of the secretaries on the republic level appears not to be functioning correctly.

²*Pravda*, March 2, 1989.

³*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

Premier of the Russian Republic Vitalli Vorotnikov's comments mirrored those of Zaikov, but he argues for greater ideological instruction and the introduction of cadres that can be trusted: "Literally two words about the press. It has indeed done much that it is useful, and it is not a case of viewing all its activity negatively. Journalists are doing much that is interesting and useful. But nonetheless we must seriously investigate critical remarks, and I would apply that in particular to television. The question is not how many conferences and seminars we hold with journalists or how the leadership of the mass media is organized in our country, but who works there. That is the question. [We need]...people on whom we can rely...[to] work in the press."⁷

Sverdlovsk First Secretary Leonid Bobykin (a Ryzhkov protege) was the most vocal opponent of Medvedev's during the conference. Speaking from the perspective of the oblast level, he states "At the same time, party organizations and communists urgently need guidance documents on ideology, policy, and practice of structuring." In addition, Bobykin states "We see no firm line on ideological questions. We see vagueness and uncertainty in speeches, and businesslike meetings with ideological workers locally have virtually ceased."⁸ Similar to Zaikov, Bobykin also attacks the decline in ideological programming found in the media: "The working person and the everyday working life of restructuring have virtually disappeared from literature, cinema, and television. They are full of thieves within the law, prostitutes, drug addicts, hooligans, and dubious supermen. We are morally corrupting our people, and again, first and foremost, the young."⁹

No speaker rushed to defend Medvedev; not even Gorbachev in his closing speech. Instead, Medvedev sought to explain his actions to the conference participants. "The ideological situation, just like the situation in the economy, the social sphere, and interethnic relations, is very, very complex."¹⁰

Medvedev also reaffirmed his support of glasnost: "We advocate the unconditional continuation of the deepening of the course of democratization, glasnost, and openness in ideological work. Nobody should have any doubts about this. Restructuring itself started with breakthroughs in the spiritual and ideological spheres and with changes in social awareness. The mass media have become a front-ranking detachment of renewal....It would be entirely incomprehensible if we embarked on the path of ending and restricting glasnost."¹¹

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Pravda*, July 21, 1989.

¹¹*Ibid.*



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To show that he is in control of ideology in the media, Medvedev gave a few examples of his accomplishments. He indicated the repeal of the 1946 CPSU Central Committee resolution on the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* and the replacement of the leadership at the State Committee for Television and Radio as proof of his oversight capabilities. However, conservative elements are further undermining Medvedev's policy of unlimited *glasnost*. The appearance of the *zapiska* from the Secretariat which accused several liberal publications by name for slander of the Soviet military testifies to Medvedev's weak control over the media.¹²

In conclusion, it is apparent that Medvedev is not the conservatives' choice for chief ideologist as he is not a Suslov-type leader during these difficult times. Instead, Medvedev's inability to offer any sort of direction for the Party indicates his weakness. In view of this lack of support for Medvedev, the argument can be made that he was a compromise choice between Gorbachev and Chebrikov in exchange for the demotion of Ligachev and Yakovlev at the September 1988 plenum, and, thus, Medvedev might only be viewed as an "interim" chief ideologist. Already, Medvedev is not participating in ideological functions. He did not address the media chief's meeting in the Central Committee on August 9, 1989; instead, Chebrikov delivered the speech on ideology.

Whether the above events offer proof of ineffective leadership could very well be taken up by the next Central Committee plenum, in which case Gorbachev could be weakened considerably.

¹²*Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, No. 6, 1989, pp. 11-14.